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From the Editor

Two major topics in this month's OS reminded me of Francis Schaeffer, with whom I studied in the early seventies. Shortly after becoming a Christian, while living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I read everything Schaeffer had written, beginning with *The God Who Is There* in the spring of 1971, and just before leaving for Switzerland in August, *Pollution and the Death of Man*. Here I was in the heart of the liberal establishment (I did not attend Harvard but worked for an architect in Harvard Square) reading someone who understood what was going on in the world from a Christian perspective. This was a whole new intellectual and spiritual world for me. Schaeffer was calling Christians to be good stewards of God's creation, unlike Fundamentalists or many Evangelicals at the time, while critiquing the environmentalist left. On the second topic he was one of the first to note the dangers of ethical and epistemological relativism invading the American academy and the culture.

Even though some on the cutting edge of the Christian environmental movement now reject the word *stewardship* because they claim the word is never used in Scripture, I demur, because the concept is clearly present in God's Word. Ecology comes from the Greek word for household (*oikos* οἶκος) which involves not only a critical understanding of an environment but also the stewardship of that environment. Joseph was a steward of Potiphar's household. Human beings, made in God's image, and living in God's world, are called to be stewards of the created environment.

Jan Dudt's article "Ecology and Environmentalism: A Christian Perspective" and review of *Beyond Stewardship: New Approaches to Creation Care*, by David P. Warners and Matthew K. Heun, eds., provide an excellent update of Schaeffer's fifty-year-old concern. The Reformed doctrine of creation provides a healthy antidote to the worship of creation that motivates much of the environmental movement. Dudt makes this clear along with his critical analysis of the essays in *Beyond Stewardship*.

Regarding the second issue mentioned above, Danny Olinger's "Smorgasbord Religion: The New American Spirituality," reviews a disturbing and important new book, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World* by Tara Isabella Burton.[1] The new arena of choice and self-invention created by the electronic environment has radically altered contemporary spirituality, highlighting the development of ethical and epistemological relativism. This review and the book give an accurate picture of the

[1] Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World* (New York: Hachette, 2020).

cultural environment in which we minister and seek to plant churches. It should be very useful to pastors and sessions.

On a happier note, William Edgar's review of *The Reading Life: The Joy of Seeing New Worlds Through Others' Eyes* by C. S. Lewis is a fascinating review of Lewis's concept of deep reading, or as Edgar reminds us, we should let books read us, not vice versa. While the book consists of excerpts of Lewis's writings, Lewis's classic on this topic should be consulted for further elucidation: *An Experiment in Criticism*.[2]

Charles Wingard reviews what looks like an unusually helpful book for preachers, *The Preacher's Catechism* by Lewis Allen. It deals with the preacher as well as his task.

Alan Strange continues his excellent commentary on the OPC Form of Government with chapters 5 and 6.

Don't miss Christina Rossetti's delightful poem, "Weary In Well-Doing." The importance of calling and contentment in the Christian life has never been so beautifully said. Emma Mason's theological biography, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith*,[3] looks like an engrossing read.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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[2] C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

[3] Emma Mason, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

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- "Genesis and Myth." (Robert Letham) 9:1 (Jan. 2000): 17–19.

- "Herman Bavinck on Creation: Excerpts from *Our Reasonable Faith*." (Herman Bavinck) 9:1 (Jan. 2000): 2–3.

- "Of Creation Days and the Keys of the Kingdom." (James Gidley) 9:1 (Jan. 2000): 21–23.

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- "The Time Element in Genesis 1 and 2." (Oswald T. Allis) 4:4 (Oct. 1995): 85–87.

Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

ServantTruth

Ecology and Environmentalism: A Christian Perspective

by Jan F. Dudt

In these days of COVID-19 there remain concerns, that are near and dear to the Christian heart, that have been put on the back burner of the issues stove. One example of this is the concern associated with the present state of the earth's environment and ecology. Many people, perhaps most, in common usage, treat these terms as synonymous. Those who work professionally in the field see them as related but truly distinct. Ecology is a raw scientific discipline that seeks to understand the interaction of biotic influences (plant, animals, fungi, microbes) and abiotic influences (soil minerals, water, climate, sunshine) that unfold in our natural world. It is conceivable that one can have extensive understanding of those biotic and abiotic interactions, on either the local or global scale, and have no real commitment to ethical human use of and responsibility for the natural world.

The terms environment and environmentalism are typically associated with concerns for ecological health and the ethics associated with proper management and sustainability of the natural world. However, those who work closely with the biological world and the abiotic factors often have a heightened sense of responsibility and paternity for the environment and ecology. Under the present situation many have noticed that things are not all right in this domain. However, Christians and the broader secular community, though interfacing with each other, often have different assessments of the situation. It is apparent that neither subculture has a perfect handle on the truth. Also, in each subpopulation there is a spectrum of sensitivities and understandings that make it impossible to paint each with simple brush strokes. Since all truth is God's truth, regardless of where it comes from, we can learn from each other. That said, syncretism remains an ever-present possibility for Christians in any cultural setting. We are not immune to such a tendency today. On the environmental issues front it is easy to syncretize unbiblical thinking with Christian and biblical understanding. Or, we can make the other mistake of not embracing the truth that we can learn from the secular mainstream.

Although we can receive knowledge and wisdom from unbelievers, Christians need to assess such information within the context of clear biblical definitions. Our approach to ecology and the environment is no exception. Our spiritual and physical health and the health of the God's ecological creation depend on it. As Christians we are often so focused on the human implications of the biblical history of redemption that we may overlook the fact that definitions regarding the created order are clearly articulated for us from the context of an unfallen paradise of moral innocence. And those definitions hold

sway in the post-fallen economy. In Genesis 1 we are told that God created the heavens and the earth, and that there is nothing that came into being that he, Christ the Word, did not make (John 1:3). This includes things visible, invisible, rulers, and authorities. All things being created for him and by him (Col. 1:16). Into this, as a crowning act of creation, humans were created as male and female, in God's image, to be fruitful, to multiply, to have dominion, and to subdue the earth as cultivators and keepers (Gen. 1 and 2). After the fall and the flood, this charge is reiterated to Noah when he left the ark (Gen. 9:1). Human status as rulers over the works of God's hands is reaffirmed in Psalm 8:6. Yet, Psalms 24:1 and 50:10 remind us that these works remain in God's possession. The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains. Even the human-owned cattle on a thousand hills are his. Although God rests from his creation until now (Heb. 4:3), he continues to create through his providential care and oversight as outlined in Psalms 104 and 147. He sends forth his Spirit and things are created (Ps. 104:30). He brings forth wine to gladden the heart of man (Ps. 104:15) and satisfies us with the finest wheat (Ps. 147:14). Hence, we are not deists, believing that God is distant from his creation. We recognize God's continual care for and valuing of his creation, even when the products are through human effort.

As we think through these definitions there are some implications. First, it is evident from Genesis 2 and 3 that pre-fallen humans were enlisted into God's service to subdue the earth, filling it with offspring and tending it, while Satan was perpetrating his rebellion against God. Given this context, what was to be the role of humans? It is evident that Satan was already working against God when Adam and Eve were in the Garden (Gen 3). It makes sense that if humans had not fallen they would have engaged Satanic forces as they expanded out of the Garden. This engagement would likely have preempted Satanic expansion. Or, possibly, humans were to redeem those gains Satan had already achieved, wrestling them from him. In any event, Satan succeeded in derailing the Creator's assignment for humanity through the First Adam. But, by God's grace, the derailment was not complete. However, humanity is divided in its allegiance between God and Satan. This division separates human populations for the Creator or against him (Matt. 12:30). It even cuts to the core of the individual. Even those who are redeemed remain in conflict with indwelling sin (Rom. 7:24–25). And, according to God's common grace, even the reprobate can do some things well.

As we know from Romans 8:19–22, the creation eagerly awaits in anxious longing for the revealing of the sons of God. In some respect this can be seen as the frustration that the creation experiences as a result of the unrealized potential that it suffers under the derailment of the assignment given to the first Adam. However, consider the pre-fallen mission. Unfallen humans would have extended the Garden's realized ecological values of diversity, productivity, peace, and fecundity to the whole globe. God's good creation of expansive primal wilderness would have been improved, made better under the efforts of unfallen humanity and its expansion of subduing and taking dominion. This is often called the Creational or Cultural Mandate.

It is impossible to know the extent to which God's good creation had been influenced by Satanic expansion before humanity's fall in the Garden. Yet, the notion of taking dominion and subduing the earth suggests that a struggle of some sort was in view for pre-fallen humanity. This struggle between good and evil would have involved human effort. Human expansion would have confronted Satanic Expansion. The first Adam would have

been on the front lines of the conflict in service of the King of the Universe. Instead, the conflict is extended to human identity itself. Satan seems to scuttle the divine project by convincing Adam that the created order, as outlined in the Creational Mandate, was not in the best interests of humanity's future. Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation to break free of the assignment as defined by God himself. Except for the grace of God their moral collapse would have been complete and the divine assignment utterly abandoned.

The created order is assaulted but it remains. Fallen humans retain the image of God. Consequently, they retain the ability to subdue and to have dominion. However, the values of the Garden, under fallen human dominion, are imperfectly expanded to the entire globe. At times, due to human greed and selfishness, there is even environmental destruction. Yet, we see glimmers of the original created order and its ideals. Well managed farms are places where productivity, diversity, fecundity, and peace can be seen even if it is to an imperfect extent. The lives of livestock and pets are stamped with Garden values. Human dominion brings a measure of peace and flourishing not found in the wild. In the wild those creatures would be vicious competitors of food items. The wilderness groans in a way that these well-managed places do not.

Fallen humans have been known to have moments of epiphany when they catch glimpses of the original created order. They may not recognize it as such. An article from the October 2009 *National Geographic* on redwood forest management is an example, in a publication not known for its sympathy for Christian thinking. The author testifies that,

> along the (redwood) forest transect *I met foresters who talked as if they've discovered the holy grail of redwood management*. What they're learning and how they're applying the knowledge can serve as a blueprint for the entire redwood range. Their ability to supply large amounts of lumber for humanity and improve ecological function is an approach that should be adopted around the world (emphasis added).[1]

This is an amazing comment on the ideal of human dominion, stewardship, and management in an age when humans are often seen as the main blight on the earth. Proper human management supplies goods and products for humanity and *improves* ecological function.

We can take note of another unexpected example of people coming to appreciate the created order. However, I doubt that they realize it. The example is found in a 2018 article in *Science,* one of the world's most prestigious science publications. The article is not Christian in the least. However, the authors do propose that humans can control the earth's systems, those envisioned in J. E. Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. The claim is that humans can enhance the inherent self-regulating systems of earth to new levels of long-term sustainability, even to the point of intentionally influencing global climate. They call it Gaia 2.0.[2]

The implication of these examples is that even fallen human management, when properly done, can make God's good creation better. When humans are a blessing, Satan frowns. His project is eroded. When humans fail to realize the ideal, the creation groans in

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[1] J. Michael Fay, "The Redwoods Point the Way," *National Geographic* (October, 2009): 60–63.

[2] Timothy M. Lenton and Bruno Latour, "Gaia 2.0: Could humans add some level of self-awareness to Earth's self-regulation?" *Science* 361 (2018): 1066–1068.

anticipation of the redemption of the sons of God that would bring restoration to the created order, releasing it from futility and slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:20–23). The ultimate restoration will come in the form of the new heavens and new earth. But humans, acting as salt and light, can bring something of that to pass in this age.

Over the past fifty years or more, there has been a heightened concern among Christians for the degradation that the environment has suffered in the wake of fallen human dominion. Humans have often subdued the earth with practices that have yielded the cost of unsustainability. In other words, the good creation, though fallen, is left in worse shape than it was found. Farming, mining, forestry, manufacturing, and waste disposal industries can all point to manmade environmental disasters precipitated by mismanagement or greed. Subsequent generations too often have found an environment worse off instead of improved. In the 1960's, works like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*[3] and Lynn White's famous essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" heightened society's awareness of widespread ecological trauma. Specifically, White's essay railed against the Christian concept of human dominion, blaming Christians for much of the environmental degradation in the west.[4] Soon after, Francis Schaeffer wrote *Pollution and the Death of Man,* calling Christians to take a more responsible and loving biblical approach to beauty and environmental concerns. He gave the 1960s counter-culture high marks for pointing out the problem. Schaeffer maintained that the church should have been beating the drum of warning, calling for environmental action because of nature's inherent value as God's creation.[5]

Here lies the challenge for Christians in any age, the Augustinian Charter for believers: take truth from the pagans, worthy ideas of God's truth, and incorporate them in a mature biblical context, while leaving behind what Augustine termed their "miserable" ones.[6] Such a process has been long recognized as one that can enrich Christian thinking, enabling it to become mature and nuanced in ways that Christianity may miss without the external stimulation. Yet, the dangers of over borrowing without proper biblically informed discernment, insight, and perception are ever present. Since the closing of the American frontier in the late nineteenth century there have been voices in American society that have called us to care for the inherent beauty and value of the environment. The establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 was not specifically a movement initiated by people in the church. The great environmental debate of the early 1900s between John Muir's preservationists (influencing the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior, and the Sierra Club) and Gifford Pinchot's conservationists (influencing the United States Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture) certainly had Christians in each camp. Neither the preservationist nor conservationist movements are recognized as having their origins among distinctly Christian thinkers. John Muir exhorted us to see humanity as one small part of the great unit of creation. Conversely, Pinchot seemed to see value in nature in light of its enduring use by humans.[7]

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[3] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).
[4] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–1207.
[5] Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1970).
[6] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/ddc.html.*
[7] Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Both views are biblically inadequate as seen by the biblical definitions above. Yet, it is likely that we know Christians who would fall in either camp. Either case would be on the cusp of dangerous error. If one overreacts to the abuses of overwrought human dominion, one may move toward devaluing humanity, seeing it as an insensitive blight on creation. In so doing, the corrective of defining dominion as a biblical concept would be missed. On the other hand, if we see God's creation only in terms of its usefulness to humanity, we are likely to lose sight of its inherent value as something beautiful and valued by God.

So, what *is* our relationship to the environment and the other life forms? Are we simply one of them, gifted with a bit more intelligence and hence some responsibility? Or, are we, as humans, a little lower than the angels, endued with rank and privilege to have freedom to do with creation as we will? It is clear from the biblical definitions that the bear and the whale are not our brothers. But as God's possessions, they are our charge. Proper dominion and care will keep them from eating us while preventing their extinction.

Christians have tried to balance these tensions. *The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*[8] attempted to reemphasize stewardship in the face of long-term sinful dominion excesses. It called for repentance for environmental abuse and reorientation to a biblical faith and expression. The long list of original signatories included several Christian college presidents and such notables as Timothy George, Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Ron Sider, and J. I. Packer. However, in response to perceived inadequacies of this declaration, another statement was drafted under the leadership of E. Calvin Beisner, *The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship*.[9] This statement has a stronger positive emphasis on human dominion and population while acknowledging the need for biblical stewardship. The signatories are a more ecumenical group that includes some notable Roman Catholic and Jewish signers as well as Protestants such as Charles Colson, James Dobson, D. James Kennedy, Marvin Olasky, and R. C. Sproul.

There certainly is no unanimity among Christians on how to approach the responsibility of addressing human needs and caring for creation. However, biblical definitions should guide us with basic principles. The relational definitions are clear. God loves his creation and the creation proclaims his glory. Humans are to love God and to love and respect his works. The creation yields to humanity and provides for its needs. The spiritual struggle, which is going on behind the environmental scene, is both Satanic in origin and the result of human failure. Yet, humans are not merely consumers like deer or crayfish. We are also creators, able to extend the values of the Garden to the rest of creation, even to the point of making God's good primal wilderness better. However, as fallen image bearers, we have the power to degrade and destroy like no other creature on earth.

How do we move ahead? Prudence would dictate that we realize our power to create or to destroy. We must consider that humanity can be either a blessing or a blight, living in accordance with the created order and its definitions or in ignorance and opposition to them. One is life-giving. One is life-destroying. Also, God can and will bless us when we

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[8] "On the Care of Creation: Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation," (New Freedom, PA: Evangelical Environmental Network, 1994), https://creationcare.org/what-we-do/an-evangelical-declaration-on-the-care-of-creation.html.

[9] "Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship" (Ringgold, GA: Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, 2000), https://cornwallalliance.org/landmark-documents/the-cornwall-declaration-on-environmental-stewardship/.

make the appropriate choices. The choices the modern voices are asking us to make are confusing. For example, population control as proposed by much of mainstream environmentalism, including some Christians, is without biblical warrant. The reproductive culture of the globe's most environmentally conscious societies must account for their self-destructive extinction trajectories. Birth rates of all the countries of the West and East Asia are significantly below replacement levels.[10] Yet many of these same societies are places where humans have never lived better. The water is cleaner, the air is better, and general health is at a historic high. Christians in these places can, and should, participate in efforts to maintain healthy environments. However, arresting development, industry, and population growth denies the created order and the human assignment. The outcome will not be a positive one.

Yet wise development, industry, and population growth require that we know the natural operations of the ecological systems we impact so that we can preserve their health and enhance their function. In so doing everything benefits, including humans, and God is glorified. Technologically sophisticated and environmentally safe waste management, recycling, and energy production are necessary to provide for the needs of humanity and to increase ecological function. Humans can accomplish this. We often do it unknowingly. For example, Thomas Malthus's famous 1790s essay on human population had worldwide population capped at about three billion, given the conditions of the early Industrial Revolution.[11] Under present economies and technologies earth's carrying capacity is probably closer to triple that. As more new technologies and economic strategies are realized and applied, that number will most likely be revised upward. Humans are creators.

But we are also sinners. Consequently, would it surprise us to think that humans could impact global climate? It would make sense that if we were technologically capable enough and numerous enough, such an impact would be possible. Many are alarmed by this and are certain of the disastrous consequences. After all, the atmospheric concentration of CO_2, a known greenhouse gas, has increased from 380 ppm to 410 ppm in the last few decades. This is higher than at any known time through the last four ice age cycles.[12] So, have humans contributed anything to the global warming cycle of the last three decades? Perhaps, for God has put all things under our feet (Ps. 8). If we can influence climate, at least in part, would it not be wise to figure out how to do it to increase global fertility, productivity, fecundity, and peace. If we can control climate, these should be governing values.

As we move ahead, it is good to remember that many doomsday scenarios predicted by certain demographers and environmentalists have simply failed to materialize. Classic among these is Paul and Anne Ehrlich's 1968 overpopulation prediction of starvation and plague by the 1980s.[13] Yet, to ignore trends of degradation would be irresponsible. By God's grace, humans can expect to have a profound positive influence on God's good

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[10] "Fertility rate, total births (per woman)," The World Bank (2019), https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN.

[11] Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers*, (London: St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1798), Electronic Scholarly Publishing Project (1998), http://www.esp.org/books/malthus/population/malthus.pdf.

[12] "Carbon dioxide: Latest measurement," August 2020. https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/carbon-dioxide/.

[13] Paul Ehlrich and Ann Ehlrich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine, 1968).

creation. Information about how to do that can come from many voices. The issue will always be whether we can discern which voices affirm the created order and which ones do not. The success of the project depends on whether Christians can think biblically, even when innovation is called for, and thus avoid the pernicious influences that may accompany wisdom. There are times when Christians are indebted to unbelieving members of society for pointing out issues that need to be addressed. However, the solutions they propose often reflect a lack of understanding of or an outright denial of the created order. Such solutions are counterproductive. The salt and light Christians offer include redirecting proposals to align with Scripture.

Selected Bibliography

Beisner, Calvin E. *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate.* Grand Rapids: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, 1997.

This work is a very balanced, biblically informed approach that emphasizes biblical definitions of the created order and the role that humans, as *imago Dei*, play in it. The emphasis of ethical human dominion and responsibility is well developed.

DeWitt, Calvin B. *Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues*, 2nd ed. Burlington, Ontario, CA: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2007.

Calvin Dewitt is one of the primary shapers of the Christian Environmental Movement. His strong notion of biblical stewardship and human responsibility is well developed in this work.

McGrath, Alister. *The Reenchantment of Nature: The Denial of Religion and the Environmental Crisis.* Danvers, MA: Crown, 2002.

McGrath makes the case that the Enlightenment created a devaluing of nature, its intrinsic value lost in the face of the machine. This led to human dominion being interpreted as a license for domination and excessive exploitation. He calls Christians back to appreciating the beauty of and inherent value of nature.

Schaeffer, Francis. *Pollution and the Death of Man.* Wheaton: Crossway, 1970.

A seminal Christian work on environmental concerns from one of the twentieth century's most critical thinking Christians. He responds to the sensitivities of the counter-culture of the late 1960s, giving credit where credit is due while steering the matter to a scriptural understanding.

Jan Frederic Dudt *is a professor of biology at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania.*

ServantStandards

Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 5–6

by Alan D. Strange

Chapter V
Offices in the Church

> 1. Our Lord Jesus Christ established his church of the new covenant on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The apostles were appointed to be witnesses to the risen Christ, testifying in the Holy Spirit to what they had seen and heard, heralding the gospel to the world, and grounding the church in the teaching of Christ. Together with the prophets they spoke by revelation, recording in the Scriptures of the New Testament the fullness of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. When their testimony was completed their calling and office was not continued in the church, and the powers and signs that endued and sealed their ministry ceased.

Comment: Before proceeding to deal with the particular offices that now obtain in the New Testament era in the church of our Lord, the FG begins, as it customarily does, with a broader treatment of the subject of offices. A variety of offices marked the Old Covenant economy (prophets, priests, Levites, judges, elders, and kings). During the important period of transition from Old to New Covenant, in which the gospel began to extend to the nations and the composition of the New Testament was still in process—notably that which is reflected in the Book of Acts—the church received the foundation described in the first sentence, grounded on the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the chief cornerstone (citing Ephesians 2:20).

The person and work of Christ rendered the OT offices obsolete, at least in the form that they assumed under the OT. One can speak of a certain analogy of OT offices with NT offices, as in the OT kingship being reflected in the governing aspects of the NT office of elder, the OT priesthood reflected both in NT ministers as well as in the priesthood of all believers, etc.[1] Even as Christ's completed work rendered the OT offices passé, so the completion of the NT canon rendered the apostleship no longer necessary. The work of the apostleship was to witness to what they had seen and heard Jesus do and say: that witness, alongside of the prophets, when captured in the New Testament, was completed with the last of the writing apostles and the closing of the NT canon.

Though some speak, as does the Roman Catholic Church, of the bishops being the successors of the Apostles, the office of Apostle, at least in its extraordinary capacity (the first-person witness and account of the person and work of Christ) admits of no successor (there no longer being need for such with a completed canon). Those extraordinary gifts

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[1] R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ: A Scriptural Appreciation of The One Holy Church (*Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 132–57 provides a handy summary of the special offices treated in this section of the FG.

that accompanied apostles and prophets (speaking in tongues, words of knowledge, performance of miracles, etc.) no longer appear in Paul's valedictory writings (in the pastoral epistles), in which ordinary church order appears and there is no reference to charismata or a continuing apostolate in any fashion.[2] Rather, what we witness in those pastoral epistles is a description of the ordinary life of the church that will continue throughout this age until Christ returns. So, it may be said that while the office of apostle has no successor as to its extraordinary aspects, it does as to its ordinary ones: the preaching of the Word and prayer (Acts 6), reflected now in the New Testament in the office of minister especially.

> 2. Our Lord continues to build his church through the ministry of men whom he calls and endues with special gifts for teaching, ruling, and serving. Some of these special gifts can be most profitably exercised only when those who possess them have been publicly recognized as called of Christ to minister with authority. It is proper to speak of such a publicly recognized function as an office, and to designate men by such scriptural titles of office and calling as evangelist, pastor, teacher, bishop, elder, or deacon. There are diversities of ministry within any office, for every man is called to be a steward of his own gifts. At the same time, a general designation of office may be applied to a group of functions within which separate offices could be distinguished.

Comment: The church is no longer in the OT period, nor the interim period during which the witnesses of the apostles and prophets, particularly as inscripturated, prevailed. The church now has God's complete Word in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments.[3] Contrary to some of the Radical Reformation (Anabaptists, Quakers, Brethren, etc.), the church still needs not only the general office of believer (to which some of the Radical Reformation reduce the whole church) but also the special offices for teaching (minister), ruling (ruling elder), and serving (deacon). Given the manifest abuse of special office in the period before the Reformation,[4] we can be grateful that the Reformers retained special office and did not join in the democratization of office that we have seen not only in the Radical Reformation but the evangelical church broadly in the last two centuries.[5]

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[2] Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979), 55–116; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word*: *A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1993), 22–51, *passim*.

[3] On the important question of "The Apostolic Origins of the Canon," see Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 160–94.

[4] This was so in several respects: in employing church discipline politically against one's ecclesiastical opponents, as did not only many popes, but also many other clergymen; in gross clerical immorality, all the way up to and including the Papacy; and in the general notion of both the secular and regular clergy that the laity were at best barely Christians and that the clergy was God's holy preserve in the world, with many monastics thinking that only they truly lived out radical Christianity, such as what the Sermon on the Mount called for. For a balanced look at the leadup to the Reformation, see Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 135–181 and Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, Second edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 23–53.

[5] Gregory Edward Reynolds, "Democracy and the Denigration of Office," in *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Role of Church Officers* (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources), 235–55.

So, we continue to speak of both general and special offices, with the word "office" deriving from a Latin word that means "duty." The focus of office in the church then is not on any privileges that may accrue to an office-holder but rather to the duties incumbent on the office. One who holds an office should be aware of such duties and seek faithfully to execute them while he holds office. Those who hold such offices do so with authority, which is to recognize that others may have such gifts without holding church office: it is not the mere possession of gifts that grants authority, but the recognition by the church of such gifts and the consequent ordination to office for the exercise of those gifts is what bestows authority.

There are various biblical titles by which office-bearers are denominated: evangelist, pastor, teacher, bishop, elder, or deacon. Each of these has specific gifts associated with the particular office, though any given office-bearer may have a multiplicity of gifts. Additionally, the office of minister has several expressions (evangelist, pastor, teacher), which subsequent chapters delineate. The office of bishop is not listed in the FG as a distinct office but is the same office as pastor of a local church.[6]

> 3. The ordinary and perpetual offices in the church are those given for the ministry of the Word of God, of rule, and of mercy. Those who share in the rule of the church may be called elders (presbyters), bishops, or church governors. Those who minister in mercy and service are called deacons. Those elders who have been endued and called of Christ to labor also in the Word and teaching are called ministers.

Comment: Whatever the earlier offices may have been in the Old Testament and in the time of the apostles before the closing of the New Testament canon, the offices that now obtain (the ordinary offices of minister, elder, and deacon that have succeeded the extraordinary ones of apostles and prophets) and that shall continue until Christ comes (and thus denominated "perpetual") are those that pertain to the ministry of the Word of God, of rule, and of mercy. Those sharing together with the minister in the rule of the church are called "(ruling) elders" or by other titles. The ministry of mercy and service (especially to the poor and needy, both in and out of the church) is the primary work of those that the Bible calls "deacons." Note here that the FG describes ministers as "elders who have been endued of Christ to labor also in the Word and teaching." The word "elder" as a descriptor for one who governs in the church may thus be used to describe both those who serve as ruling elders as well as those who serve as ministers. In other words, the minister is an elder as well as a minister (in fact, some Presbyterian churches call them "teaching elders"); the ruling elder, however, is not a minister, as such, but is one who joins with the minister(s) in the joint rule and governance of the church. To be sure, some ruling elders may be quite "ministerial" in their gifts and be able to do many of the things that a minister or local pastor does. However, such gifting on the part of ruling elders is to be regarded as a blessing, a sort of "extra," and not a requirement, not essential, for all who would hold the ruling elder office.

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[6] See Charles Hodge for a discussion of why we could use "bishop" for "minister" or "pastor" in the Presbyterian Church but tend not to, *Discussions in Church Polity* (1878; repr., New York: Westminster Publishing House, 2001), 242–43.

Chapter VI
Ministers or Teaching Elders

1. The ministry of the Word is a calling of God to stewardship in the gospel. In this ministry there is a diversity of gifts that are essential to the discharge of evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching functions.

Comment: The previous chapter describes all ordinary office-bearers of our present era, the three offices set forth in Paul's pastoral epistles of minister, elder, and deacon. This chapter focuses on the first of these: the Minister of Word and sacraments. It begins by noting that the ministry of the Word is a calling of God to stewardship in the gospel. The concept of calling (or, to use the Latinate word, "vocation") bears a special significance for the minister.[7] The minister, unlike the elder or the deacon, in the Presbyterian tradition is an office not only in which the incumbent serves for his lifetime, but also one in which he customarily works exclusively (admittedly serving bi-vocationally in some cases). This contrasts with the offices of elder and deacon in which such office-bearers may or may not serve for a lifetime (though this writer believes that there is biblical warrant for them to do so); but, in any case, elders and deacons ordinarily have regular jobs outside the church and do not give their full-time attention to the service of the church.

The notion of calling among Protestants differs from that which proceeded it in the Roman Catholic Church. In pre-Reformational times office had developed so that all offices (deacons, presbyters, bishops) were regarded as clergy (and thus full-time). Thus, ranks were introduced among the clergy. When Calvin and other Reformed theologians spoke of "the parity of the clergy," they meant that the offices of deacon and elder should no longer be considered clergy (as "ministers" continued to be considered, in some sense) and that those who were properly clergy were equal, even if functioning differently (as pastors, doctors, etc.). Particularly Calvin and the Reformed came to the conviction that the Roman Catholic office of bishop (leader of the diocese, or area church) and presbyter (minister, or priest, laboring in the local parish) were the same, not that the bishop was a superior cleric to the inferior parish priest.[8]

It was only at the Reformation that the apostolic pattern of lay deacons and elders was restored and that calling came to be viewed as something that pertained not only to clerics but also to the laity at large. In the middle ages, for instance, one's vocation (calling) was either secular (parish priest) or regular (monastic), and if one were asked what his vocation was, any such inquiry meant the questioner wanted to know, for the secular cleric, what parish he served, or for the regular cleric, in what order his monastic calling was. After the Reformation, the notion of calling expanded so that not only the religious (clergymen) had callings but everyone had a calling, whether butcher, baker, or candlestick maker. The clergy, however, did retain for the Reformers a call to special office that even the other office-bearers did not have in the same sense. In other words, the Reformers would typically speak of a minister being called to his ministerial office

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[7] Robert L. Dabney, "What Is a Call to the Ministry?" in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, v. 2 (1891; repr. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 26–46.

[8] Few have as firm a grasp on the problems in the Roman Catholic Church with office, discipline, etc. and treat it as fairly as does Philip Schaff. For the early church development of these issues, see, Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, v. 3 (1889; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 234–374.

and would not necessarily speak of the ruling elder or the deacon as having the same sort of calling.

For the minister, calling is conceived as having two parts: an internal call and an external call. The former is that which is impressed upon the heart of one gifted for gospel ministry and involves both a subjective awareness of God's gifting for ministry and a sense that God wills one to pursue such ministry, together with the desire for such in the case of one so called. The external call is the recognition and affirmation of that call on the part of the visible church, brought to expression by a call to labor (as a pastor, for instance, in a local congregation), eventuating in ordination and installation with the laying on of hands, in which all of the outward authority of the church is brought to bear for one entering the ministerial office.

The ministerial office is also said to involve a stewardship, inasmuch as the steward of a house is not the householder (he's not "over the house" as only the owner and master is). Ministerial stewardship involves a right handling and management within the church of all that pertains to gospel ministry, including the mysteries of God, reading and preaching the Word, leading in prayer and singing, etc. Here in this chapter the stewardship specifically pertains to the varying gifts needed for the different functionaries that labor as gospel ministers, listed here as those which mark ministers as pastors, teachers, or evangelists.

2. Every minister of the Word, or teaching elder, must manifest his gifts and calling in these various aspects of the ministry of the gospel and seek by full exercise of his ministry the spiritual profit of those with whom he labors. As a minister or servant of Christ it is his duty to feed the flock of God, to be an example to them, to have oversight of them, to bear the glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing and beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, to exhort and convince the gainsayer by sound doctrine, and to dispense the sacraments instituted by Christ. Among those who minister the Word the Scripture distinguishes the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher.

Comment: Here, as in the PCA Form of Government, the minister is noted to be a teaching elder.[9] He is an elder, one that governs in the church, and he is also a teacher, holding not only the governing office along with the ruling elders, but the teaching office, to which the sacraments are also allied. He is gifted by God and called by God, both internally in the candidate and externally by the visible church, to carry out his ministry of evangelist, pastor, or teacher. He is to fully exercise the gifts that pertain to the ministry God has given him and the church has recognized, ordained, and installed him for, so the saints might be maximally edified, i.e., so that he might work most fully to the greatest spiritual profit of those among whom he has been called to labor.

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[9] Morton Smith, in his *Commentary on the PCA Book of Church Order*, Sixth Edition (Taylors, SC: Presbyterian Press, GPTS, 2007), page 65 notes, "The PCA, after an extensive study of the question of the number of offices, has come to the position that the New Testament teaches that there are two permanent offices in the Church, namely elder and deacon." Hence the PCA BOCO reflects that, in distinction from the OPC FG, which retains the three-office position from earlier Reformed and Presbyterian polity. Smith continues, "Once the church reached this conclusion [of two offices only], the PCA has re-written the two chapters found in previous forms of the BCO under the titles 'Of the Ministers of the Word' and 'Of the Ruling Elder' into a single chapter entitled 'The Elder'."

Such labor among God's people for every minister, whatever his function, includes feeding the flock of God, which involves preaching and teaching God's Word to them. Being an example to them involves living before and among them as Christ did, imitating Christ in all his matchless virtues. To have oversight is to give leadership and join the other ministers and elders in the spiritual government of the people. The responsibility of a minister is not only to those within the church but also to those outside, and this is why he must preach the gospel (bearing the glad tidings of salvation) to those who don't know it and are going to hell (the ignorant and perishing), pleading with them to come to Christ, to be reconciled to God through Christ, going so far as to warn and convince those in open opposition to the truth (the gainsayer). As noted, allied to these holy tasks the minister dispenses the sacraments of initiation (baptism) and continuation (the Lord's Supper). All of this is true to all functionaries of the ministerial office, whether evangelist, pastor, or teacher.

3. He who fills this office shall be sound in the faith, possess competency in human learning, and be able to teach and rule others. He should exhibit holiness of life becoming to the gospel. He should be a man of wisdom and discretion. He should rule his own house well. He should have a good report of them that are outside the church.

Comment: Having mentioned the duties of the office of minister the FG now lists some of the general qualifications for ministerial office. The minister must be sound in the faith, which is to say that he must be orthodox. This is what presbyterial examination seeks to ascertain: orthodoxy, competency, holiness, and wisdom. Here is the second requirement, then: a minister much possess competency in human learning, i.e., he should be able both in general learning as well as in theological learning. He should not only know and believe the faith, however, but should also be able clearly to express it so that others can understand it (teach) and give guidance and leadership to others (rule; this also includes of his household—if he can't rule at home, how can he rule in the church?). He must also be holy as is the heavenly Father, walking with exemplary piety before the flock. He must be a man not only of learning and piety but of wisdom, the practical application of God's Word, and have good judgment with respect to himself and others (discretion). Finally, he must not have a bad reputation with those outside the church. Outsiders may hate him for upholding the truth, but they must have no just cause for otherwise thinking ill of him.[10]

4. Every minister shall be a member of a regional church and has communicant fellowship in any local congregation of that regional church. The presbytery, with the concurrence of a ministerial member, may request a session within its bounds to exercise pastoral care over him in its behalf. A session, with the concurrence of the

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[10] One of the chief influences on Morton Smith's *Commentary* (he has several, page 11) is F.P. Ramsay's *Exposition of the Form of Government and the Rules of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (1878). Ramsey, quoted by Smith in *Commentary*, page 77, helpfully says in a comparison of all special officers, with an eye to all the relevant Scriptures: "All officers, then, are to excel in a living piety, deep and manifest, and in mental balance, or good sense; to these qualities Ruling Elders are to add pre-eminence in wisdom, and a grasp of the system of truth; and to all these qualities the Ministers are to add pre-eminence in learning and aptness to teach."

presbytery, may grant the right to vote in the congregation to any ministerial member of the regional church.

Comment: The membership of every minister is not in a local, particular church, as is everyone else's membership ordinarily, including other office-bearers (ruling elders and deacons). Many wonder why this is, particularly wondering what a regional church is. Historically, a regional church was simply the congregations of a clearly defined area, based on proximity. For instance, when Paul writes to the church in Ephesus or Corinth, we are not to think that he is writing to a particular local congregation but to the church (singular) that exists in Ephesus and Corinth, made up of a number of congregations. While each congregation of thirty or forty people (meeting in homes or elsewhere) would typically have deacons and elders, they would in a regional church, typically share ministers. Thus, the minister would not be a member of any particular local congregation but of the regional church. More about the justification for such an arrangement at the appropriate place.

Perhaps it is enough here to note that this arrangement has continued even though a regional church may not be limited to a city or more discrete area. Because the minister is a member of the presbytery, this allows him fully to serve a particular local congregation, especially as a pastor, without being a member of that congregation. All the local members of a particular church, including elders and deacons, have a sort of ownership in the local church that the minister does not: while having membership in the broader church, he remains the one called to wash the feet of the saints in the local church in humble non-possessive, disinterested (non-partisan) service.

It is the case that as a member of the regional church every minister has communicant fellowship in all the congregations of that regional church. Part of the implication of this is that any minister whose membership is in the regional church would have the privilege of the floor in any assembly of that regional church, though he would not have a vote in any of them, including his own, since his membership is not in the local but in the regional church. This is only true for ministers, being regional church members, and not for elders and deacons, being particular, local church members. However, a session, with the agreement of the presbytery, may grant a vote in the congregation to any minister of that presbytery, which is to say that a pastor of a particular church, for instance, might be granted such a right by his session and presbytery. Though he remains exclusively a member of the regional church, (he is not also a member of the local church), he simply has the right of congregational vote in the local church. The presbytery may also ask the session of any particular local church within its bounds to exercise pastoral oversight of a minister, which is to say, that a minister who serves as teacher (in a college or seminary, for instance) may enjoy such oversight by the particular local church that he attends.

Alan D. Strange *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as professor of church history and theological librarian at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, and is associate pastor of New Covenant Community Church (OPC) in Joliet, Illinois.*

ServantReading

Going Beyond Stewardship—Where is Dominion?

A Review Article

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by Jan F. Dudt

Beyond Stewardship: New Approaches to Creation Care, by David P. Warners and Matthew K. Heun eds. Grand Rapids: Calvin College Press, 2019, xiv + 236 pages, $17.99, paper.

Since 1967 and Lynn White's essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,"[1] Christians have often been on the defensive regarding their approach to the environment. Over the years there have been several attempts by Christians to address the concerns leveled against the Christian contribution to our modern environmental crises. Admittedly, Christians, including Evangelicals, have often lagged behind other voices in the culture which raised red flags over the extent of environmental degradation that our modern industrial society had spawned, even as economic progress and general human health increased. There were a number of notable attempts to correct and encourage Christian thinking on environmental matters. Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man*[2] was a clarion call in the wake of the first Earth Day. He challenged Christians to take the lead in creation care as a result of the biblical mandate to have dominion and care for the earth, as God had assigned to humans in Genesis 1 and 2. He noted that proper understanding of the implications of biblical thinking on the matter should compel Christians to be in the forefront of environmental care. As environmental awareness rose in Christian circles through the 1970s, the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship sponsored research and several books, culminating in the development of the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies. Other evangelical efforts through the 1990s included the Evangelical Declaration of the Care of Creation,[3] whose many signatories included well-known Christians like the environmental leader Calvin DeWitt and others like Ron Sider, Rick Warren, and J.I. Packer. The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship[4] came soon after, as a result of perceived inadequacies of the earlier declaration, and was

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[1] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–1207.
[2] Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1970).
[3] "On the Care of Creation: Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation" (New Freedom, PA: Evangelical Environmental Network, 1994), https://creationcare.org/what-we-do/an-evangelical-declaration-on-the-care-of-creation.html.
[4] "Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship" (Ringgold, GA: Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, 2000), https://cornwallalliance.org/landmark-documents/the-cornwall-declaration-on-environmental-stewardship/.

signed by a host of evangelical luminaries such as Charles Colson, James Dobson, D. James Kennedy, R.C. Sproul, as well as some prominent Jewish and Catholics leaders like Rabbi Jacob Neusner and Richard John Neuhaus.

Beyond Stewardship: New Approaches to Creation Care, the latest effort from the Calvin Center, attempts to take a matured environmental approach that reflects the development of thinking over the last few decades. The book draws from historical Christian perspectives on care of the creation as well as ideas from contemporary mainstream environmental thinking. This attempted synthesis highlights a tension for Christians. We desire to glean the best from mainstream environmentalism while bringing true Christian salt and light to bear on the situation. In attempting to do so, *Beyond Stewardship* challenges the reader with insights that result from the authors' thinking on the topic but at times departs significantly from sound Christian doctrine.

The book is made up of fourteen chapters sandwiched between a forward, preface, and introduction, and an afterward, postlude, and appendices. Chapters 1 and 2 comprise "Part One, Rethinking: Expanding Awareness." Chapters 3 through 7 comprise "Part Two, Reimagining: How Things Could Be." Chapters 8 through 14 are "Part Three, Reorienting: Hopeful Ways Forward." Of the 22 contributors, 19 of them are associated with Calvin College as graduates, professors, or students. The book could be considered a cutting-edge product of thinking within the twenty-first century North American Christian and Dutch Reformed world. However, the ideas presented in *Beyond Stewardship* are also a reflection of and a challenge to a much broader audience.

The authors respond to perceptions of inadequate environmentalism developed by Christian thinkers over the last several decades. They acknowledge the contribution of earlier attempts while challenging the reader with the need for a more mature and sustainable environmental ethic and approach. In the preface they echo Schaeffer from decades ago with the questions, "Why isn't the broader Christian church leading the way?" (2) and "Why haven't Christians been more engaged in creation care activities?" (4). The introduction's author responds with an outline of the book and a critique of the traditional environmental term "stewardship." The term is seen as an unhelpful invention of earlier twentieth century, never found in Scripture, and too anthropocentric and consumption-oriented to develop a proper creation care approach (15, 74).

The authors accurately note that human sinfulness is an extreme encumbrance to realizing the divinely assigned creation mandate to care for the Garden, to be fruitful and multiply, to have dominion, and to subdue the earth. However, the biblical term dominion is seldom mentioned due to perceptions that abuses of human dominion have rendered the term unhelpful (8, 9). The stated objective is that humans as stewards should be replaced with humans in kinship with the rest of creation (16). Dominion and the idea of improving creation (subduing the earth) are seen as hopelessly limited by human sin and finitude (96). Here they run off the biblical rails. Our finitude was part of human identity at the time of the charge and is not to be considered an encumbrance, but rather part of the created order. Sin, with its debilitating and blinding effect, is the problem. Iterations of finite environmental strategies would likely have been part of a pre-fallen human effort. The cover of the book features an expansive heartland scene of wind turbines overshadowing productive agricultural fields, an apparent improvement over the cover of an earlier book showing coal generators' cooling towers over a similar landscape (18). Certainly, the multitude of expensive, noisy, raptor swatting, eye sores cannot be the final solution to

humanity's energy needs. However, the need to replace earlier technologies need not be the sole result of sin. Improvements and iteration would conceivably have been part of expanding human dominion even if the fall had not occurred.

The call for us to lament the human negative impacts that irreparably harm God's good creation is appropriate. However, the call to embrace kinship with the rest of creation apart from a biblical understanding of human dominion, flourishing, and development as a delight to God is overlooked. For example, the claim in chapter 3 "that Scripture does not call us to use and manage creation, rather it calls us to intimate kinship with it," (45) is biblically weak. Scripture clearly puts humanity in a different category than the rest of creation. While the author's claim is born out of an understanding of the importance of incarnation, he overlooks the call for humans to extend the values of the Garden to the rest of the globe, since we are charged to fill or even swarm the earth (Gen. 2 and 9).

The author of chapter 3, Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, indicates when considering the sacraments, "we can give thanks to the sources" of the elements "for their participation in the holy moment" (51). This idea, unhinged from human exceptionalism as *imago Dei*, strikes frightfully close to animism or pantheism, neither of which have especially good records of environmental stewardship. The author is correct in pointing out that radical protection and preservation is part of human calling, but he fails to acknowledge that human creative development that expands the qualities of the Garden, to make God's good creation better, is part of that.

Chapter 4's author, Clarence W. Joldersma, notes that earth's supportiveness is not automatic, and that life has become more precarious because recent human activities have disrupted trustworthy planetary conditions (63). However, this overlooks the idea that human dominion has made human life much less precarious than in former times. Even the animals and plants under our charge often find life much less precarious than without it. Sin abounds, to be sure. However, a farm, as an expression of human dominion, demonstrates that cows, cats, dogs, and chickens can live in peace.

The authors of chapters 5 and 6 (Aminah Al-Attas Bradford and Steven Bouma-Prediger) do a fine job of reminding us of humanity's profound and inescapable connectivity to and dependence on the rest of creation down to the microbes that beneficially inhabit our bodies. Truly, it is easy to overemphasize human importance and underemphasize the inherent value of the creation around us. The authors clearly emphasize the incarnation of Christ, who as they claim, undoubtedly housed microorganisms as humans always have (76). They argue that overemphasis on human importance has led many to a view of stewardship that is too anthropocentric (74). However, the call to retire the term "stewardship" in favor of "earth-keeping," may miss the point. Abuses of a good term may require revisiting true biblical definitions. Mere switching without such definitional care would be useless. Claiming that other creatures are our brothers and sisters is unhelpful and unbiblical (53). It would be better to emphasize their inherent value as part of the creation while acknowledging that they are our charges, not our brothers.

The authors of chapters 8 (Debra Rienstra) and 9 (Matthew C. Halteman and Megan Halteman Zwart) challenge us to consider our kinship with other animals as exemplified by Adam's naming of the creatures. Rienstra suggests that God is more concerned for the workload of caring for the Garden than for the fact of Adam being alone (109). While one can appreciate the desire to see animals as created beings, the emphasis is hard to insist on, considering the biblical rejoinder, "there were none suitable for him" (Gen. 2:20).

Chapter 9 examines the transformation of a city girl who finds herself on a relative's farm. She is struck by the farm family's utilitarian approach to the well cared for livestock, but in the end she desires to see them not as resources for humans but as joint members of the created order. In response, she becomes vegan (127). The implication that eating less meat is the higher moral ground is not as informed by biblical perspective as it is by the modern sentimental environmental zeitgeist.

The remaining chapters make a better case for a biblical perspective as modern society attempts to address modern environmental concerns. The author of chapter 10 (Becky Roselius Haney) shows how some societies overestimate their ability to manage ecosystems, causing Dust Bowl-like destruction, while others have been able to take a more restorative or sustainable approach. The author appreciates John Wesley Powell's desire to understand the interdependent relationship between humans and nonhuman systems that requires patience, humility, and the acceptance of limits (140). This attitude is much preferable to the hubris of a "we know best" approach to stewardship.

Chapter 11 (Gail Gunst Heffner) deals with "environmental racism" (150), perhaps better stated as economic elitism, which does not take the needs of less advantaged communities into proper consideration. Hence, intercity communities near industrial sites, or poor rural communities, often suffer degradation and health concerns that would not be tolerated in more privileged communities.

In chapter 13 (Mark D. Bjelland) the concept of stewardship is somewhat rehabilitated over what was suggested in earlier chapters. Here it is stressed that humans are not a weed species that the world could do without, but rather humans are a part of the created order. Human enhancement of the created order would be furthered by developing a sense of human place in a Wendell Berry sense of the term (174). It is acknowledged in this chapter that humans can restore and improve God's creation. However, developing a mindset of commitment to place is difficult in our transient mobile society. Perhaps this mindset could be developed with a heightened sense of understanding our world as a gift, laden with inherent value as David Paul Warners describes it in chapter 14.

Beyond Stewardship has many challenging ideas that can address the modern environmental crisis. However, there is a mix of true Christian thinking and modern environmentalism that smacks of sentimentalism, idealism, and unhealthy preservationism. This runs the risk of denying the importance of humans as image bearers assigned by God to take dominion and subdue the earth. Ideas of human abundance can be lost in favor of a human-denying environmentalism if Christians are not careful. Ideas of filling the earth with humans (Gen. 2) to the point of swarming (Gen 9), or filling Judea with returned diaspora until there is no room for them (Zech. 10:10) is lost on those who either do not understand what it means to be *imago Dei* or those who choose to deemphasize it. Christians must always fight the temptation to be syncretistic with their greater culture. This is as true for us today as in times past. Imagine modern environmentalism informed by biblical principles stressing the concept of human value, creativity, and ability to improve the good creation that God has made. Conversely, imagine Christians adopting secular concerns untethered from Scripture. When we read *Beyond Stewardship,* we must ask who is influencing whom?

Jan Frederic Dudt *is a professor of biology at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania.*

ServantReading

Smorgasbord Religion: The New American Spirituality

A Review Article

by Danny Olinger

Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World, by Tara Isabella Burton. New York: Hachette, 2020, ix + 301 pages, $28.00.

Tara Isabella Burton's *Strange Rites* is not an easy book for a confessional Reformed Christian to read. The language is vulgar and graphic at points. She seems to have little grasp of or interest in an orthodox view of special revelation or why a defense of "the" Faith might be important when compared to a defense of Christian Theism. Theologically, she paints with a broad brush that minimizes the distinctions that can exist within Protestantism, much less for Presbyterians and the Reformed. As a journalist she makes sure that the door will remain open for her to write in such places as the *New York Times,* "a publication whose relative centrism can be gleaned from the fact that left- and right-wing critics alike are constantly accusing it of extreme bias" (172). Her one mention of John Calvin is to make a joke about the mantra of wellness culture being equal parts Ayn Rand and Calvin, "you're not just allowed but in fact obligated to focus on yourself—but, no matter how much you do, it will never be good enough" (98). Added to everything above is that each chapter describing the religious landscape of America seemed more discouraging than the previous chapter. When I reached the last page and finished the book, I wrote in red ink after the concluding sentence, "Depressing Book!!!."

While the book is not easy to read it is an important—almost essential—book. Rarely in recent times have I underlined more passages and taken more notes than I did with this book. Her insights are particularly illuminating on why so many millennials who have grown up in the Internet age have abandoned institutional Christianity. Her thesis is that increasingly Americans, especially younger Americans, are not rejecting religion, but remixing it according to their own interests. They long for a sense of meaning in this world but reject authority, institution, and creed that conflicts with their own intuition, personal feelings, and experiences. The result is a "remixed" religion, a new Great Awakening where spirituality incorporates the individuality that the internet has provided for nearly every other aspect of modern life.

The Religious Remixed: "I make my own religion"

Burton points out that in polling almost forty percent of Americans born after 1990, the so-called young millennials, say that they have no religion. These religious "Nones" are both the fastest growing religious demographic group in America and the largest at eighty-one

million people. To put that in perspective, they are now more numerous in America than Roman Catholics and Evangelicals combined.

This is not to say that the religious Nones are uninterested in spirituality. What Burton attempts to prove in the book is that "the story of the rise of the religious Nones in America, it turns out, isn't really about Nones at all" (17). What it is about is a blending of "traditional religious practices and personal, intuitional spirituality: privileging feelings and experiences over institutions and creeds" (18).

In her judgment, this is the result of an internet-defined generation and the self-creating power of social media where people are accustomed to finding their own sources of information and mixing it with different perspectives. This belief, that one's religious life can and should be customized to one's personal interests and wants and needs, has become an embedded part of the culture. She concludes, "We may not all be Remixed, but we all live in a Remixed nation" (25).

Burton explains what this means in practice for the Remixed. They can mix-and-match so that they can get their sense of community from one place (fandom) and their sense of meaning from another (social justice activism). They can employ rituals associated with wellness culture while seeing their calling in life as primarily political. But what ties everything together is a rejection of authority and institutions and the embracing of "intuitional religions."

By this ["intuitional religions"], I mean that their sense of meaning is based on narratives that simultaneously reject clear-cut creedal, metaphysical doctrines and institutional hierarchies, and place the locus of authority in people's experiential emotions—what we might call gut instinct. Society, institutions, credited authorities, experts, expectations, rules of conduct—all these are generally treated not just as irrelevant, but as sources of active evil (33).

Truth also gets redefined according to the Remixed. Truth claims that come from rules or doctrines are regarded with suspicion. One's emotional experience, such as a feminist's lived experience, is what functions as an authoritative account of the world. Seventy-five percent of millennials agree with the statement "Whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know" (33). Demanding creative ownership of their spiritual lives, the Remixed repeatedly told Burton when they were interviewed, "I make my own religion" (33).

This freedom appeals to many who previously saw themselves as outside of organized religion. In particular, women who see organized religion as upholding an oppressive patriarchal culture and queer people who felt marginalized by traditional religion view this freedom as revelatory, even necessary. But Burton asks: If the personal authenticity and experiential fulfillment of intuitional religion becomes the norm so that everyone is a high priest, then who is willing to kneel? (34).

Mainline Protestantism's Decline

Burton believes that Remixed religion is likely to stick around due to "the absence of wider demographic pressure, the power of consumer capitalism, and the rise of the Internet" (53). What she does not believe is the typical media spin that young people are necessarily put off by repressive and outmoded values of religion. "In fact," she writes, "it seems that the very un-repressive strains of mid-century Protestantism and ecumenism—the theologically

unchallenging ‘come for Christmas and Easter only’ variants—have, for the past few decades at least, been doing significantly worse than their more conservative counterparts” (54).

Specifically, the religious Nones “have grown up seeing religion as a social or communal institution—a ‘nice to have’ teaching ‘good values’ or solidifying family bonds—but not necessarily as a core part of their meaning or purpose” (54). According to Burton, the Nones saw their parents attending church, but they were acutely aware that their parents really didn’t believe.

This is in contrast to the youth who were raised in a Christian home where the faith mattered. Burton notes that these households were more likely to have children retain their faith. “Of born Protestants whose parents talked about religion ‘a lot,’ 89 percent continue to identify as Protestant, while just 8 percent call themselves unaffiliated” (54). Conversely, children of interfaith households where presumably a consistent doctrine was not advocated are more likely to leave organized religion behind. Burton concludes that the “raised religious” who are leaving the church are not for the most part those whose parents found purpose and meaning in the faith. Rather, they are those raised with the sense that religion is what one does.

This has led to an exodus in mainline Protestant churches. In 2017 the membership of mainline Protestantism made up ten percent of the American population, but of these barely a quarter attended church. Burton projects a bleak future for mainline Protestantism, even citing Ed Stetzer’s projection that “if mainline Protestantism continues to decline at its current rate, the whole community will be wiped out by 2040” (52).

Today’s Great Awakening and the Birth of Remix Culture

Remixed millennials, disillusioned that their parent’s religious traditions did not provide a coherent account of meaning and purpose in life, nevertheless do not embrace religious traditions that disagree with their personal stances on LGBTQ and sexuality issues. This puts them, in Burton’s judgment, between a rock and a hard place: they desire moral and theological certainty, but they are repulsed by any authority that would put limits on sexual desire.

Corporations have seized upon this spiritually bubble and sought to fill the gap. Nike celebrates Colin Kaepernick’s decision to take a knee, enabling it at the same time to promote its moral righteousness in a political manner and enhance its financial bottom line. Burton observes, “In so doing, they are creating moral universes, selling meaning as an implicit product and reframing capitalist consumption as a religious ritual—a repeated and intentional activity that connects the individual to divine purpose in a value-driven framework” (59).

Another cultural phenomenon that has filled the spiritual gap is J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Burton maintains that its popularity owes in part to the fact that it was “the first media property to go viral in the Internet sense and the first to almost exclusively harness the Internet, rather than analog media, as the medium by which its fans converged” (75).

She speculates since sixty-one percent of Americans have seen at least one *Harry Potter* film and fifty percent of Americans could not name the four Gospels, the odds are that Americans are more likely to name the four Hogwarts’ houses. More alarmingly, she also states that *Harry Potter* has displaced the Bible as a sacred text for many, though Burton also notes that Rowling has come under recent criticism for being insufficiently woke (84).

What applies to the fandom of *Harry Potter* in regard to the creation of a spiritual universe also applies to earlier spiritual universes like those in the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* series. The Remixed question why they must fit into the narrow category of organized religion with its doctrines and creeds that do not adhere to progressive values reflected in these beloved entertainments. "Why not use the language of Hogwarts' houses to talk about good and evil, alongside the rhetoric of social justice and metaphors garnered from *Star Wars*?" (88).

Burton contends that if fandom provides the structure of Remixed religious culture, then wellness culture provides its implicit theology. The anthropology of wellness is that we are born good but tricked through Big Pharma, processed foods, and civilization (the toxic energy of others) into a life that is short of our best. Sin is insufficient self-care. Prior to the emergence of SoulCycle, Goop, Thrive, and WW, Orpah Winfrey articulated the "oxygen mask theory" that they all employ. That is, life is like being on an airplane where you need to put your own oxygen mask on before helping the people around you.

Doctrines for a Godless World

According to Burton, there are two de facto civil religions that are battling for supremacy among the Remixed. The first is social justice culture. Social justice culture, which she says has fueled such movements as Black Lives Matter and #Me Too and led to the 2018 election of "the Squad" to Congress, sees America as a repressive society where progressive politics are the means to slay the Goliaths of racism, sexism, and other forms of injustice. The second is the techno-utopian culture of Silicon Valley. Techno-utopian culture puts forth a libertarianism that looks to technology as that which can unleash human potential. The two civic religions share a disdain for rules, maxims, and mores of society. Traditional authority is seen as oppressive. But, in Burton's view, most importantly both groups treat earthly self-actualization as the ultimate goal. Consequently, "both groups are fundamentally eschatological yet thoroughly materialistic" (168). They seek a kingdom of heaven on earth rather than a world to come. The techno-utopians seek it through robot-fueled singularity. The social justice culture seeks this kingdom on earth through Marxist-style cultural revolution.

Burton predicts that social justice will probably win the battle to become the new civil religion in America, and based on events following the publication of her book in April her prophecy has proven true. Her commentary on the movement is helpful in understanding what is happening in society. She writes that social justice activists see society as having been shaped by white and male privilege. This has led to racism and sexism that are fundamentally unjust. Government institutions like the police and border patrols are viewed "not merely as ineffectual, but as actively malevolent agents of structural inequality and the cruelty and brutality such inequality manifests" (169–70).

Burton states that compared to the national average, social justice advocates are twice as likely to say that they never pray, twice as likely to have finished college, and three times as likely to say that they are ashamed to be an American. They are suspicious of authority and politics play a key part in their identity. Consequently, for this group, the election of Donald Trump as president was a tragic reminder that America, despite its lofty ideals at its founding, is a country built on white supremacy, patriarchy, repression, and hatred.

Andrew Sullivan and David French are two conservative critics who have written, in Burton's judgment, pejoratively about the social justice movement. Sullivan "derisively" called the movement the "Great Awokening" and "derided" its advocates as "humorless neo-puritans" who delight in canceling the insufficiently enlightened (176–77). French, "equally skeptical," saw the social justice movement engaged in a religious war when he wrote, "Out with the Christianity that spawned American higher education, in with a ferocious new faith—a social-justice progressivism unrestrained by humility and consumed with righteous zeal" (177).

For Burton, Sullivan and French "in their knee-jerk derisions of it as a ridiculous cult" (177) fail to realize how right they are that this is a religion. Social justice has provided meaning and purpose for the secular and reenchanted a godless world. God is not needed to create an eschatologically focused account of a meaningful existence, and yet the movement draws from traditional religion. Its success is in replicating the cornerstones (meaning, ritual, community) of traditional religion in an internally cohesive way. It takes the varied tenets of intuitionalism, the self, emotions, and identity, and threads them together into a visionary narrative of political resistance and moral renewal. It provides for a sense of community with its collective ritual catharsis of calling out problematic enemies or insufficient allies who deserve to be canceled. It provides an explanation of evil, "an unjust society that transcends any one agentic individual and, more specifically, straight white men" (178). By equating the problems of a repressive society with the egos of straight white men, social justice is able to balance its fatalistic conception of society now with a more optimistic future. The goal is new creation, that is, a new world full of love and compassion that will arise "from the ashes of a patriarchal, racist, homophobic, repressive, Christian society" (178).

Religion and the Modern World

In conclusion, Burton argues that the world is not a godless one but profoundly an anti-institutional one. Affluence and the proliferation of the Internet has rendered us all parishioners, high priests, and deities simultaneously. In her opinion, this has led the church into a catch-22 situation. Those communions, like Christian evangelicalism, which are stringent and theologically demanding retain a greater percentage of their members. But, they are also more likely to alienate those who are unable to conform to their identities and values. Conversely, mainline Protestantism is more capable of welcoming those on the theological margins but more often than not fail to retain members or fill spiritual needs.

But Burton does not stop with the comparison. She asserts that once you go down the route of relaxing elements of your faith tradition, then what's to stop you from seeking a mix-and-match religious identity that fits your personal needs, identity, and situation. As an example, she says what is to stop you from combining "Episcopalianism with yoga, tarot, poly community, or seek communal and spiritual fulfillment outside of organized religion altogether?" (243–44). In other words, what you end up with is a Remixed nation, a place where God and his authority is not needed for spiritual purpose and fulfillment.

Danny E. Olinger *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as the general secretary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.

ServantReading

The Reading Life

A Review Article

By William Edgar

The Reading Life: The Joy of Seeing New Worlds Through Others' Eyes, by C. S. Lewis, edited by David C. Downing & Michael G. Maudlin. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2019, xvi + 171, $19.99.

The question "have you read this book?" would not have interested C. S. Lewis. He would want to know, "has this book read you?" The distinction is all important. For Lewis, a good book is not one you might have read and then set aside, but one that has transported you to another world, one that should be read over and over again. He was himself, of course, a superb writer. But throughout his works, often between the lines, he reflected on the joys of reading. This anthology of such reflections was waiting to be gathered. It is not certain why this had not been done before, but here it is.

This marvelous collection of insights into reading assembles fifty-two excerpts from Lewis's *œuvre*. By rights we ought to be intimidated, not to say alienated, by someone as voracious a reader as C. S. Lewis. He apparently spent at least eight hours a day doing it. We have all met the immodest name-dropper who wants us to know how much he has read. Yet, somehow Lewis is never threatening nor snobbish about his rapacious talents. Indeed, in one of the brief essays here he decries boastful literary critics for their sense of moral superiority against such "rabble" as the common reader.

The reason reading is good for the soul is that it takes us out of ourselves, regardless whether what is being said might be true or empirically verifiable. Literature, he argues, is *logos*, admitting us to experiences other than our own. Good literature extends our being, frees us from the narrow confines of our own experience. As such it heals our wounds without denying our individuality. In a memorable quote, Lewis tells us, "Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do" (9).

For this reason, as he argues throughout, good art should be *received*, not *analyzed*. For one to be able to receive a great work, there is no sense in discussing its greatness before just getting out of the way, surrendering and not demanding (149). If this sounds like idolatry, it is not, though it does give us insight into the seductions of the idol. Idols are not so much bald-faced lies as they are deceptive counterfeits of the real thing. But the best literature draws us in, leads us, willingly or not, into worlds that we otherwise could not conceive, and makes us the better for it. At first, a number of these fragments may sound like the ultimate attack on the politically correct. They do occasionally take aim at the conformist and commonly held notions of the unliterary. For example, Lewis famously defends fairy tales, good ones, against the bromide "oh these are but fairy tales." Adult literature, according to the modern critic, is writing appropriate to the reader

having grown up and who is now beyond childish things. For Lewis, the real grown-up is someone who can still treasure the best of childhood practices. Becoming older may involve *change*, so that we can now enjoy Tolstoy or Jane Austen, but growing older should not be outgrowing good things (20). In a riff on the Pauline love passage, he confesses, "When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up" (19).

Lewis's insights will charm many and no doubt madden others. For example, he cordially dislikes Alexandre Dumas' the *Three Musketeers*. The story only puts you in "an abstract world of gallantry and adventures which has no *roots*—no connection with human nature or mother earth." Dumas cannot *show* you the cities of Paris or London; it is as though he had never been to either (154). On the other hand, he loves *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Hobbit*, and even Beatrix Potter, for their ability to put you into another world and let you see through the eyes of the local inhabitant. He loves Tolkien's concept of *sub-creation*.

There is a man in our lives my wife and I like to call Mr. Toad. He drives an expensive car and does not seem to realize the boastful countenance he exudes. He is benevolent, yet condescending, talented, yet needing an audience. Lewis muses on the choice of the toad in Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*. Why not a stag, or a pigeon, or a lion? "The choice is based on the fact that the real toad's face has a grotesque resemblance to a certain kind of human face—a rather apoplectic face with a fatuous grin on it." The toad cannot stop grinning because its "grin" is not a grin at all. "Looking at the creature we thus see, isolated and fixed, an aspect of human vanity in its funniest and most pardonable form . . ." (50–51). This is pretty much the character of our friend: he is ridiculous but also vain in a quite pardonable way!

Lewis himself used talking animals in his tales. When reading *Narnia* we never pause to think, "oh, why on earth is this creature talking?" We accept the premise that once on the other side of the wardrobe, things are different: not worse or even better, but different. The trick is to suspend disbelief for the sake of something profoundly true. Lewis once said a Christian writer ought to have blood in his veins, not ink. By this I think he meant if you have a sermon, go ahead and preach it . . . from a pulpit. If you venture into literature, you ought not to have in mind a certain message. This will end up as propaganda. Instead, you must first love words and love the people who produce them. In a word, you must be human. Then, when you write, your Christian faith cannot help but show through. So don't worry about a "dispatch"; just write.

Parts of this anthology will please the word police (of which I am one). One chapter is titled, "How to Murder Words" (81–83). These titles are presumably created by the editors, not by Lewis, but they are on the whole faithful to the content. The paragraphs here are about "verbicide," the murder of a word. The comments would please any English teacher worth his salt. One way to kill a word is inflation. *Awfully* for "very," *tremendous* for "great," etc. One of my own pet peeves is turning nouns into verbs: to prioritize, to impact, and the like. One place we can be sure to encounter verbicide is on airplanes. The flight attendant will tell passengers when to "deplane." Or the doors will close "momentarily." A friend of mine whispered, "will they open again in mid-flight?"

Lewis notes the tendency (what would he say today?) to confuse description with approval or disapproval. For example, behaving like an *adolescent* somehow means behaving badly. In the chapter, "Saving Words from the Eulogistic Abyss" we are warned against using words as an evaluation, instead of what they originally meant. For example, "he behaved like a perfect gentleman" today means the person was decent and kind, whereas the original simply meant he held property (86–7). *Abstract* once meant essential, whereas today it means vague or shadowy, or lacking substance. Christian readers will identify with Lewis's concern that in our times the term *Christian* might mean something like, decent or just good. But, he argues, it should simply mean someone truly committed to the Apostles' Creed, whether or not he is a good person.

Examples could be multiplied. To be called "inappropriate" or even "offensive" today is synonymous with being "wrong." Lewis would have said, better to be wrong and liable to punishment, than just "insensitive" or the like, which defies objective norms of transgression.

Understandably, Lewis balked at the way Hollywood could distort the true sense of fear and of romance found in the original. His comments are not simply the cranky objections of the purist. And he is not against making movies out of classics. But he worries that certain films cannot convey a world or a feeling the way a book can. He uses the example of *King Solomon's Mines* (73). In the book by H. Rider Haggard (1885) the hero awaits death inside a rock chamber full of mummies. In the film version (he was presumably watching the 1937 version, directed by Robert Stevenson) there is plenty of excitement, even suspense, but very little fear of real danger.

Why should Christians be interested in these essays? Lewis does not discuss theological or biblical matters much. Of course, he does so elsewhere. One of the virtues of Lewis's approach is that it gets us away from a concern only with one dimension in life. Believers ought to become more open, less fearful. American believers in particular are so prone to individualism they tend to reduce the faith, and everything else, to propositions they may like. If so-and-so is *saved* or even *born again* we don't need any further involvement. Never mind whether the person needs more love, or the society he frequents needs reform.

Taking *The Reading Life* seriously can even help us better understand the Bible. In our defense of Scripture we often become empirical without intending to. We may even become afraid of images and metaphor. How could Noah's flood have really covered the entire earth? Are there big fish in which a man can live for several days? Can a virgin really conceive a child? In my own view these things did happen. These are legitimate issues in the face of skepticism. But to limit our apologetics to simply trying to prove that science and miracles are compatible is often to miss the heart of a story. More significantly, it may lead us to miss the primary author himself and thus prevent receiving his love. A friend of mine was interviewed for a position at the Yale Divinity School. At one point he was asked whether Genesis was theology or history. He asked the committee, "Do I have to choose?" He did get the job, but his question was a good one.

Most Bible stories have at least three characteristics: doctrinal payoff, literary structure, and theology. C. S. Lewis helps us particularly with the literary aspect of a story. To read, say, Jonah, and only be concerned with the possibility that a large fish could swallow a man is fine, but it misses the main point of the story, which is Jonah's hardness of heart. If we read chapter 2 as genuine repentance, we will be puzzled by the

rest of the book which shows no real proof of Jonah's repentance. But if we pay attention to the literary nature of the book, we will see that Jonah's prayer from the belly of the great fish is theologically correct but lacking in all sincerity. The author of the book is quite the artist. He underscores the contrast between the downward movements and then the rising movements in the text, helping us understand the depths of Jonah's rebellion and the zenith of God's love. Some of my colleagues in the Bible department have done extensive studies on the use of plants in the prophecy.

Evangelicals rightly worry about such trends as "narratology" according to which propositional truth is suspect and every sermon must tell stories. But it is possible to overreact and deny or minimize the literary aspect of a biblical account and slouch into arid sermons. In another example, we may cull thoroughly from Job's so-called friends' remarks and legitimately find in them a mixture of truth and error. But why do we need over thirty long chapters of their dialogues with Job just to be wrong? The length is intentional. In part it helps us see their obstinacy and lack of imagination compared to the simplicity of Job's vindication. In part it shows us how tedious is unbelief. Again, why does Daniel several times enumerate the large number of the king's officers ("Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up" (3:3; 3:27). Surely it is to render the pretention, the affectation of such an entourage. Or, again, why does the genealogy in the beginning of Matthew's Gospel add up to fourteen generations, when we know there were more? Matthew the Jew wanted his readers to have an easy way to remember the main links in the chain from Adam to Christ. He also wanted to highlight Jesus' paternity. He is the son of Abraham and of David (implicitly the son of Adam as well). Not only is his ancestry Jewish, but, significantly, Gentiles appear in the genealogy, and so do women: Rahab and (presumably) Bathsheba, not to mention Ruth who chose Naomi's God over her paganism.

As an academic and a theologian, I get exposed to a great deal of literature related to divinity. Much of it is good, often solidly orthodox. But occasionally what I see suffers from being dry. To put it a Lewisian way, it lacks imagination. But thankfully, I then do encounter warm, pastoral, even poetic, theology. That kind leads me to pray and worship. Every church leader and possibly every Christian believer ought to read this excellent book. It will help them transcend themselves and in the bargain become more themselves as God meant them to be.

William Edgar *is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and serves as professor of Apologetics and Ethics, Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, Pennsylvania.*

ServantReading

The Preacher’s Catechism *by Lewis Allen*

By Charles M. Wingard

The Preacher’s Catechism, by Lewis Allen. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018, 226 pages, $10.92.

Years ago someone pointed out to me that a principal value of a catechism is to teach students to ask the right questions. Since the seventeenth century the Westminster Shorter Catechism has taught believers to ask (and answer) the right questions about the Bible, the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, man’s duty to God, the way of salvation, and the means of grace.

Employing the Westminster Shorter Catechism as his model, Lewis Allen’s *The Preacher’s Catechism* helps preachers ask the right questions about their lives and ministries. He is convinced that it “is an outstanding resource for the heart needs of every preacher” (21), a conviction that he demonstrates admirably.

The book’s forty-three brief chapters—each in question, answer, and commentary format—are divided into four sections:

- The Glory of God and the Greatness of Preaching
- Jesus for Preachers
- Loving the Word
- Preaching with Conviction

Each chapter of *The Preacher’s Catechism* is three to four pages, making it an excellent companion to personal devotions. The author makes good use of classic Puritan and Reformed texts on the preacher and his work.

Just as the Westminster Shorter Catechism covers much territory, so does *The Preacher’s Catechism.* It contains brief reflections on a large number of topics. Because of this, perhaps the best way for me to introduce this book is with a sampling from each of its sections. Below, the catechism questions are in bold followed by snippets of his commentary.

Like the catechism, Allen begins with first things:

> Q. What is God’s chief end in preaching? A. God's chief end in preaching is to glorify his name. (27)
>
> What is your heartbeat? Do you love to preach, or do you love the One you preach? Do you love to prep your sermons, enjoying the hard mental and spiritual work, or do you love the One you are discovering more about? . . . Our challenge as preachers is

> to remain lovers, to refuse to let our calling, however important and exciting, obscure our primary calling to be captivated ourselves by God's love in Jesus Christ. (30)

On the hardship that comes to the preacher as he loves and walks with Jesus:

> Q. Surely we preachers don't have to suffer, do we? A. We have no choice but every help as we follow the Jesus who chose to suffer. (83)
>
> Endure hardship. Not because it is good for you, like a diet or exercise, but because Jesus did, and our calling is to be transformed in the image of his holiness. (84)

The Ten Commandments are considered from the preacher's perspective. Take for example the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother." As in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the application of the commandment goes beyond one's parents to all who are in positions of authority.

> What does the fifth commandment teach us? You shall honor those who preached the Word of God to you, and obey what they taught you.
>
> Rather than waiting to be respected (which is never taught in the Bible), preachers need to work out how to give honor as they should. . . . All of us have been deeply influenced by other preachers. Some are now in glory, many of whom, known to us only through their books, have been there for centuries; and others we will never meet though their ministries continue to bless us through sermons we download. . . . Honor them. . . . Honor the preachers who are in your life, too. The best and most godly preachers seek out others who share their calling. There's no competition or jockeying for attention. Godly preachers serve each other with support and advice, when requested. Preachers who avoid local brothers engaged in the same work show an integrity gap: who wouldn't want to support and be supported by brother preachers? Where is the honoring in avoidance? (137–139)

In considering the work of the pastor, readers are asked:

> What happens when preachers actually believe in Jesus? A preacher living close to the cross and relying on grace is a fearsome weapon in the hands of God.
>
> Be a man of the cross. We are never more in awe of the work of Christ for us, and then able to serve our hearers than when we are on our knees, confessing our need of forgiving grace in repentance. The gospel we preach must be the gospel we consciously rely on. And what we rely on, we love. (171–172)

The author is sensitive to the swings that can take place in a minister's interior life. The pendulum moves back and forth between sinful pride and sinful despair, and between painful insecurity and dangerous self-confidence. At times we preachers rob God of his glory by self-promotion; at other times—when discouraged—we overlook the imperceptible but real growth that takes place as the Word is faithfully preached. Allen

reminds us that “self-pity is as much out of place in Christian ministry as self-promotion is” (49).

Asking the right questions and identifying the right answers are indispensable to a fruitful and enduring ministry. *The Preacher's Catechism* supplies both. As I read this book, I came to believe that I was in the hands of a sound physician of the soul. His well-framed diagnostic questions can lead to deeper faith, genuine repentance, and the restoration of joy to ministry.

The pastor works hard and often finds himself weary. Add ministry’s trials to fatigue, and even the most faithful minister can become discouraged. Ministers who’ve been down this path will treasure this book. So too will the pastor who amidst the daily routines of ministry, senses that he, like the Ephesians, is in danger of abandoning the love he had at first (Rev. 2:4).

The Preacher’s Catechism is not a book to be hurried through, but savored. I’ve now read it twice in consecutive years. One sentence especially stands out: “Our first calling is not to preach [Jesus] but to love him and to walk with him” (79). Remember that, preachers, and we will glorify and enjoy the Savior we proclaim.

Charles Malcolm Wingard *is senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Yazoo City, Mississippi (PCA), and associate professor of pastoral theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.*

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830–1894)

Weary In Well-Doing

I would have gone; God bade me stay:
    I would have worked; God bade me rest.
He broke my will from day to day,
    He read my yearnings unexpressed
        And said them nay.

Now I would stay; God bids me go:
    Now I would rest; God bids me work.
He breaks my heart tossed to and fro,
    My soul is wrung with doubts that lurk
        And vex it so.

I go, Lord, where Thou sendest me;
    Day after day I plod and moil:
But, Christ my God, when will it be
    That I may let alone my toil
        And rest with Thee?